



Home Safety Checklist For Seniors

Approximately 1.4 million seniors, age 65 or older, are treated in emergency rooms for injuries related to consumer products each year. Although injuries in and around the home can happen in many different ways, falls usually tend to be the biggest culprit.

These numbers shed some light on just how prone to falls and injury seniors can be in their own home:

- Over 8 million hospital ER trips are the result of falls, which is the leading cause of visits
- According to the CPSC, more than two million fall injuries each year are the product of floors and flooring materials
- 1 and three people over the age of 65 in the United States experiences a fall each year
- Incidence of falls rises as each decade of living passes
- 60% of fall-associated deaths occur in those who are 75 or older

A home safety checklist for seniors is a great way to assess an entire living space and determine where potential hazards could arise. Falls and injuries can occur in any room in the home. They are most prevalent in places like bathrooms and staircases, but hazards can be present in each and every room.

Be prepared and take action now! Take the time to go through each room in your home – and the area surrounding your home (the yard, walkway, garage) to assess possible hazards. It is important to make a list of all potential safety concerns and take preventative measures to address each and every one.

Being Prepared for Emergency Situations

If you wait until an emergency situation rears its head, it will already be too late. It is important to prepare in advance and not only take preventative measures but also have a plan in place if you need to exit your house quickly or get help.

Fire Safety

Fire safety should be a part of any home safety checklist for seniors. Seniors are at higher risk than others when it comes to residential fires. The elderly are three times more likely to pass away in a residential fire than those who are younger.

Having your home assessed is necessary to determine what your smoke alarm needs are. Once you've had an assessment, you will know where you need smoke alarms and which rooms they need to be installed. Being educated when it comes to fire safety could wind up saving your life.

Keep it low

If you don't live in an apartment building, consider sleeping in a room on the ground floor in order to make emergency escape easier. Make sure that smoke alarms (with carbon monoxide detectors) are installed in every sleeping room and outside any sleeping areas. Have a telephone installed where you sleep in case of emergency. When looking for an apartment or high-rise home, look for one with an automatic sprinkler system. Sprinklers can extinguish a home fire in less time that it takes for the fire department to arrive.

Sound the alarm

The majority of fatal fires occur when people are sleeping, and because smoke can put you into a deeper sleep rather than waking you, it's important to have a mechanical early warning of a fire to ensure that you wake up. If anyone in your household is deaf or if your own hearing is diminished, consider installing a smoke alarm that uses a flashing light or vibration to alert you to a fire emergency.

Do the drill

Conduct your own, or participate in, regular fire drills to make sure you know what to do in the event of a home fire. If you or someone you live with cannot escape alone, designate a member of the household to assist, and decide on backups in case the designee isn't home. Fire drills are also a good opportunity to make sure that everyone is able to hear and respond to smoke alarms.

Open up

Make sure that you are able to open all doors and windows in your home. Locks and pins should open easily from inside. (Some apartment and high-rise buildings have windows designed not to open.) If you have security bars on doors or windows, they should have emergency release devices inside so that they can be opened easily. These devices won't compromise your safety, but they will enable you to open the window from inside in the event of a fire. Check to be sure that windows haven't been sealed shut with paint or nailed shut; if they have, arrange for someone to break the seals all around your home or remove the nails.

Stay connected

Keep a telephone nearby, along with emergency phone numbers so that you can communicate with emergency personnel if you're trapped in your room by fire or smoke.

Are the Rooms in Your Home Safe?

A common misconception is that injuries occurring to seniors within their homes are usually related to falls on stairs or in bathrooms. Injuries and dangers within the home are not limited to falling, however, and can happen in many different ways. Home safety could potentially be at risk in almost any room in a given house. Any home safety checklist for seniors should include each part of the home.

Bathroom Safety

The bathroom is one of the most common locations for injuries to occur within the homes of the elderly. Not only can injury happen in the shower, but the shower can also cause the floor to get wet which can create an unsafe/dangerous environment outside of it. These are a few of the things that should be tended to in the bathroom:

- Tub or shower should be equipped with a non-slip surface
- If the shower has doors, they should be made of safety glass or plastic
- Grab bars should be installed both by the toilet and the bathtub
- Towel bars should be sturdy and installed correctly
- Flooring should consist of textured tile, a matte finish or should be covered with low pile commercial carpet
- The lighting should be even, sufficient, and glare-free. The light switch should be near the door
- Door should open outward
- A ventilation system and safe, supplemental heat source
- Outlets should protect from electric shock
- A bath or shower seat should be accessible

Staircase Safety

Climbing or descending a staircase can prove to be extremely dangerous even for healthy, middle-aged adults. It's not hard to understand why so many seniors suffer injuries as a result of an unsafe, shoddy staircase. The stairs should be a part of any home safety checklist for the elderly. Here are some precautions that can be taken to make sure your staircase is as safe as possible:

- **Stair construction:** Stairs should always be evenly built. If they are not dimensionally uniform, it exponentially increases the odds of tripping and falling
- **Stairs should be clear:** This sounds obvious, but people leave things on staircases all of the time including books, papers, or shoes
- **Staircase lighting:** Every staircase in your house should have sufficient lighting throughout so that you can clearly see each step – night lights are an ideal solution for dark hallways and stairways.
- **Maintenance:** If carpet or tread is worn, it can be very dangerous and cause a fall. Replace any worn tread or carpet on your staircase immediately
- **Placement:** Sometimes people are unaware of the presence of a stair in poorly lit areas or in parts of the home where the patterns and colors run into each other
- **Handrails:** Every staircase should have a functional, sturdy handrail that runs the length of the staircase – ideally there should be a railing on both sides of the stairs. Circular rails are best as they are easier to grip completely compared to rectangular rails

Kitchen Safety

When it comes to a household safety checklist, the kitchen may be one of the last rooms in your house that you think to address. However, many accidents can occur in the kitchen, so it is imperative to check this list to make sure you are taking the proper precautions:

- Your kitchen should be equipped with a fire extinguisher that is less than ten years old and is verified to work
- The area around the stove should be clean and free of clutter. Grease, towels, potholders, and curtains are all examples of things that could easily catch fire
- Ventilation and exhaust in the kitchen are paramount. Without proper ventilation, carbon monoxide or indoor air pollutants may accumulate and make the air unsafe
- Never leave cooking food unattended. Anything on a stove top should be supervised at all times
- All electrical appliances and cords should be kept away from the sink or anywhere there is water. Cords should also be kept away from hot surfaces
- All countertop appliances such as toasters, coffeemakers, etc., should be protected by ground-fault circuit interrupters
- A sturdy step-stool with a handrail should be on hand for reaching up onto shelves or high cabinets to retrieve items

Bedroom Safety

Yes, even bedroom safety precautions are important to take and need to be a part of any home safety checklist for seniors. Injuries and accidents can happen in any room of the house, and the bedroom is no different than any other. There are steps you can take to ensure that your bedroom is as safe as possible:

- Make sure there is an easy to reach light that you can get to from your bed
- The path from your bedroom to the nearest bathroom should have enough lighting so that you can see if you need to get up in the middle of the night
- Cords are a tripping hazard; if there's a phone in your bedroom that is not within reach from your bed, you should consider moving it closer
- If you wear eyeglasses, make sure they are also well within reach in case you need to get up in the middle of the night for any reason
- A lamp or flashlight should be kept within range of your bed so that if you lose power for any reason, you have access to light
- Have a sturdy chair with arms in your bedroom so that you can sit to dress if need be
- Candles, ash trays, hot plates, or any other potential fire sources should be kept far away from curtains, furniture, beds, and bedding

Living Room/Living Area Safety

Living rooms typically have televisions with cords, telephones, tables, chairs, and many other things in them that could potentially cause a resident to get hurt. You may also have a fireplace in your living room area which has safety concerns of its own. Here are a few of the things that should be a part of any elderly home safety checklist when it comes to the living room:

- If you have a chimney and a fireplace, make sure it is evident before use. A clogged chimney can result in poisonous fumes and smoke entering the home
- Check all rugs/carpet to make sure it is level with the ground. If either of these surfaces bunches up, they could cause you to trip and fall
- Remove low coffee tables, foot rests or any other object that is low to the ground and blocking a clear path through the room
- Do not run cords under a rug and keep all pathways clear of wires that could cause you to trip
- Discard any furniture that feels loose or wobbly as it could create a safety hazard

Laundry Room/Basement

- Make sure you have adequate lighting – increase wattage to allowable limits and add overhead and wall lighting if necessary.
- Check to make sure there is at least one secure railing the entire length of the wall. Ideally there should be a railing on both sides of the stairs.
- Does the last step of the stairway into the basement blend with the color of the basement floor? You can paint the bottom step a different color of the basement floor to distinguish the last step from the basement floor.
- Basement stairs can traditionally become a storage area for shoes, boxes and jars. Take time to clear the stairs and set a new policy of no storage on the basement stairs.
- If laundry containers or detergent bottles become too heavy to lift you could divide the solutions into smaller containers to make them more manageable to lift and maneuver.
- When detergent spills on the floor you should set a policy to clean up the spill immediately and to always wear shoes or socks with non-skid shoes in the laundry room.
- If your laundry room is in the basement you may want to consider relocating the room to a main living floor to avoid the need to carry baskets of laundry up and down the stairs.

Garage

- Check that any stairs or railings into a garage are secure and in good condition.
- Just like the basement floor – if the last step of the stairway into the garage blends with the color of the garage floor you may consider painting the bottom step a different color of the garage floor to distinguish the last step of the stairway from the garage floor.
- Never let trash pile up. It can become a fire and tripping hazard. Make sure you have enough containers to hold trash and don't over load the containers. Consider smaller loads in trash cans to make moving them to the curb for trash collection easier.

Foyer/Yard

- Steps in your yard and foyer should never be overlooked for condition and railing needs.
- Are steps or walkways too steep, cracked or uneven? Consider installing railings where steps or walkways are steep. Have damaged surfaces repaired. And – if you have a choice of routes to and from your home - determine which route is the safest and resolve to use it.
- Do you have adequate lighting in your foyer and yard? Motion-activated lights help you better see at night and provide additional security.
- Assess your yard and garden areas for holes and hazards (such as weeds, vegetation, bushes and lawn ornaments or furniture) that could cause unsteady footing or tripping hazards.

Wrapping Things Up

Home safety is something all seniors should take very seriously. As we age, we become a little less physically capable as we once were and can become more vulnerable to injuries within our home. Accidents can occur anywhere within the confines of our residency, so a home safety checklist for seniors is highly recommended.